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Actually, the problem here is not so much the concept of "warning time" itself -- a concept that, when properly understood, can be both illuminating and helpful -- as with a fairly widespread misunderstanding of what the concept entails, coupled with the fact that the word "warning" carries several different meanings which are not always properly distinguished. The first sentence of your 28 May letter actually pinpoints the problem; for "warning time" and "warning of war" often involve quite different sets of concepts. Some wars (e.g., Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland, North Korea's June 1950 invasion of South Korea) probably did follow the sequence of decision (i.e., adopted intention to attack), capability augmentation, implementation (i.e., actual launching of an attack). In many other cases, however, this is not the sequence events actually follow. In cases such as these (e.g., Czechoslovakia in 1968), the use of force (or initiation of hostilities) becomes, early on, one of a range of serious options addressed by a potential aggressor's top policy-making body (e.g., the Politburo). Capabilities are augmented, sometimes behind a screen of deliberate deception, to keep this option open and make it genuinely, or increasingly, viable. But the actual decision to adopt this option, i.e., to strike, may not be made until very late in the process rather than at the outset. In such a situation, there will be no evidence early in the game of firm intent to go to war -- not because (in this instance) intelligence is deficient but because no such firm decision has yet been made. In such cases, a warning keyed to hard evidence of an attack decision -- i.e., a firm "intent to go to war" -- will inevitably come very close to the actual initiation of hostilities, too late for counter-action if the latter is not initiated until such evidence is in hand. In this sort of situation, we need to be warned when a potential adversary first begins to weigh initiating hostilities as a serious practical option. This should be considered the start of the "warning time" clock, not the final decision point which may come much later -- long after capabilities are already augmented.

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